INTRODUCTION

One question that prevails throughout modern culture and history is the problem of evil. To be stated as, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” This question and philosophical statement have seemed to hold people back from believing or coming to faith in Jesus Christ. People look at the world around them and wonder how a God who supposedly created the world could allow devastations like natural disasters, wars, and diseases to happen to people who, from outward appearances, are good people. People pose the question to show that God does not exist. The problem of evil has been one of the most challenging problems in philosophy, as it is difficult to reconcile the conception of a good God with that of an imperfect universe.[1] C.S. Lewis stated that it is amazing, given the extent of human suffering, that people should continue to believe God is love.[2] When asked why C.S. Lewis was an atheist and why he did not believe in God, he would respond with a statement like this: “Look at the universe we live in. By far the greatest par of it consists of empty space, completely dark and unimaginably cold. The creatures cause pain by being born and live by inflicting pain and in pain they mostly die. The race is doomed, and all life will turn out to have been a transitory and senseless contortion upon the idiotic face of infinite matter. If you ask me to believe that this is the work of a benevolent and omnipotent spirit, I reply that all the evidence points in the opposite direction. Either there is no

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[1] Homer Dubs, "The Problem Of Evil," *The Journal of Religion* 11, no. 4 (Oct. 1931): 554.

[2] James Jones, *Why Do People Suffer* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1993), 30.

spirit behind the universe, or else a spirit indifferent to good and evil, or else an evil spirit."[3] How do we respond to this question of why bad things happen to good people? Are there examples from scripture that answer that question? This paper proposes to look at this topic by understanding what evil is and where it comes from, a Jewish understanding of the problem of evil, and how the book of Job and other Old Testament scriptures help us develop an appropriate response to that question.

CONTENT

What is Evil and Where Does it Come From

Where does evil come from? How can we define it? In a better sense, it is not to define but describe it. One way to do that is to have a working description. Michael Peterson suggests, "Let us leave open the question of definition and proceed with a broad common-sense notion of evil."[4] Although people may disagree regarding the precise definition of evil, there is, at the same time, a widespread agreement concerning the kinds of things that can legitimately be called evil. Peterson suggests items like extreme pain, the suffering of the innocents, physical deformities, psychological abnormalities, injustice, and natural catastrophes.[5] That list includes what are typically called moral evils and natural evils. Plantinga states that moral evil refers to wrong and hurtful acts and dispositions of human beings—lying and stealing, dishonesty and

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[3] C.S. Lewis, *The Problem Of Pain* (New York: MacMillan, 1948), 1-3.

[4] Jennifer Thweatt-Bates, "Chaos Theory And The Problem Of Evil," (PhD diss., Abilene Christian University, 2002), 3, TREN (050-0117): citing Michael Peterson's book R*eason & Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*.

[5] Ibid.

greed; natural evil refers to physical pain and suffering that results from impersonal forces, such as floods, earthquakes or epidemics.[6]

Christians have generally agreed that evil is not a substance or a thing but instead is a privation of a good thing that God made.[7] A privation of a good is the corruption or twisting of a created thing's essence or substance.[8] There can be good without evil, but there cannot be evil without a good upon which it preys. The concept of evil as a privation of the good has been essential in undermining at least one argument against the existence of God from evil, namely that God caused evil.[9] Evans states that though as God created only actual things or substances, evil is not an actual thing or substance. Therefore, God did not create evil.[10] He states that, as a corruption of twisting of what is good, evil is the absence of something that ought to be; it is the absence of what fulfills a thing's nature or essence.[11] Evans describes that we need to distinguish between a defense and theodicy. He states that theodicy is an attempt to justify the ways of God in light of the vast amounts of evil we find in the world. A theodicy attempts to answer the question "why."[12] A defense, as one might guess, is not an attempt to explain what is up to in permitting evil but instead tries to provide rationally compelling reasons to question the

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[6] Cornelius Plantinga, *Not The Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 14.

[7] Jeremy Evans, *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Robert Stewart (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2013), 1.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid, 5-6.

soundness of the argument from evil against the existence of God. Rather than make suggestions about God's reasons for permitting evil, a defensive strategy generally concludes that the atheist's objection to evil is either inconclusive or logically fallacious.[13]

In classical philosophy, we can understand the arguments from the direction of Aquinas. The problem and the origins of evil can be stated as follows: God is absolute and perfect, God cannot create anything imperfect, and perfect creatures cannot do evil, so neither God nor his perfect creatures can produce evil.[14] Both Aquinas and Augustine state that God created perfect beings, but part of that perfection was the power of free choice, and through free choice, His creatures brought about evil.[15] Aquinas distinguishes between God giving us free will and the presence of evil. He states, "God, therefore, wills evil to be done, nor wills it not to be done, but He wills to permit evil to be done, and this is good."[16] Geisler clarifies that we are not free but have free choice.[17] It is stated that evil is a byproduct of good. When we think about good ideals, we have created a byproduct of evil distorted by humanity's choice. Geisler says, "Evil is sought indirectly because it is the consequence of some good."[18] Aquinas summaries it as follows:

> The problem of evil is one of the most irritating to a theist. Why does a perfect and infinitely powerful God allow an evil world like this one? Aquinas responds that God is perfect, and he made an ideal world. One perfection he gave was free choice, which

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[13] Ibid, 6.

[14] Norman L. Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), 151.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid, 152.

[18] Ibid, 156.

> brought about the corruption (privation) of these perfect things. Yet God administers this world in an ideal way. God will produce the greatest moral perfection achievable when good triumphs over evil. In short, God is the best Being possible, and even though this is a less-than-best world, he is working in the best possible way to achieve the best world he can. Since God is all-powerful and defeating evil is not impossible, this will eventually be achieved.[19]

It is us, God's created creatures that have caused evil.

Bruce Little, in his book, *A Creation-Order Theodicy: God and Gratuitous Evil*, describes Christians having to try defending the existence of God in light of the horrific evil that happened on the morning of September 11, 2001.[20] Little explains that for a tiny window of history, America acknowledged both the existence of evil and the existence of God and reopened the age-old question: If God is all-powerful and all-good, how is it that evil of this magnitude could exist in a world created and maintained by God?[21] For a brief time that nation looked to religion for some explanation of how God fit into all this mayhem so that there might be a reasonable hope found in God. The Christian community tried to defend God's existence against objections based on some horrific evil. Augustine tried to attempt to harmonize the reality of evil and the claim for the existence of God when barbarians invaded Rome. For Augustine, God allowed only that evil into this world, from which He could bring a great good or prevent a worse evil.[22] Little explains that the Greater-Good theodicy has recently become the working model by which most Christians have attempted a response to the argument but has proven to be unconvincing.

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[19] Ibid, 159.

[20] Bruce Little, *A Creation-Order Theodicy: God and Gratuitous Evil* (Lanham: University Press Of America, 2005), 1.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid, 2.

Is there a solution to the problem of evil, and if it were possible to arrive at a solution, what are the requirements needed to make it satisfactory? Homer Dubs proposed them by stating that we should be as strict as possible. First, he suggests, a solution must preserve the reality and heinousness of evil.[23] The seriousness of moral life requires that evil be considered not a whit less evil, but if possible, more so, since man must bend all his efforts to its control. Second, he states that an adequate solution to the problem must preserve the moral character of God. It must make Him as interested in eliminating evil as man is. God must be good in the same sense that man is called good.[24] Lastly, he suggests that an adequate solution must preserve the power of God. Religion postulates God so that value may be realized in the universe, and unless God is all-powerful, that maximum value may not be realized. Pluralism has failed to meet the demands of religion at this point; by limiting God, it has not given the religious man any assurance that his greatest values will be realized and has limited the value of the universe for him.[25] Dubs states that these three requirements set stringent limits to the nature of an adequate solution and that historic solutions have transgressed one or more of them.

One of the questions posed is the idea of God's omnipotence. Omnipotence is that God cannot violate His nature, and thus, He cannot do the logically impossible.[26] Some would state that either God has done his best and lacks the power to do better, or they state that besides God, there is a devil, with the world as a battlefield between the forces of good and evil, and it looks

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[23] Dubs, "The Problem Of Evil," 554.

[24] Ibid, 554-555.

[25] Ibid, 555.

[26] Little, *A Creation-Order Theodicy: God and Gratuitous Evil*, 12.

like God is not able to stop evil from happening.[27] That points to a problem, namely, the problem of sustaining a religious attitude of worship and adoration for a being that is imperfect, the difficulty of resisting the admission of further imperfections once some limitations are allowed, and the difficulty that such a God is not the God the existence of which the celebrated arguments such as the cosmological, teleological and the ontological seek to prove.[28] McCloskey states that he avoids the problem of evil by claiming that God is imperfect but explains various types of the nature of evil. He states that one way is for people to view evil as unreal. One way to view this is usually explained with an analogy with the arts, in that discord in one part of a symphony produces greater harmony and beauty. However, few theists would seriously wish to contend that moral evil is unreal and an illusion rather than reality. If there is one thing of which we are confident, it is that sin is actual. Christians, with our emphasis on sin and atonement, recognize this in that the thoroughly lousy man is not simply an illusion of an evil man. He is a bad man.[29] In this argument, we must have a "God's eye view" to see that such alleged evil is a valuable part of the whole, heightening the beauty of the majestic and divine melody. Unless we had a "God's eye view" of the universe, we could not on this view know when we were eliminating or introducing real discord.[30] The problem is trying to explain the problem of evil with an analogy. We indeed need to see an act in its proper context to judge whether it is right or wrong. So, acts are good or bad by their intrinsic nature or consequences.

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[27] H. J. McCloskey, "The Problem Of Evil," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 30, no. 3 (July, 1962): 187-188.

[28] Ibid, 188.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

The attempt to solve the problem of evil by asserting that evil is unreal rests on an argument that, if valid, would suggest that evil might be justified. It is an argument that most theists will feel compelled to reject because of its shocking moral implications and is invalid because it rests on a false analogy between aesthetic appraisal and ethical judgment.[31] Another way to view evil is that it is genuine but justified that moral evil is explained as a consequence of God's gift to man of free will.[32] That means that physical evil is always deserved. Still, there is no apparent correlation between the distribution of suffering and the virtue and vice of sufferers, and even more undeserved are the innocent beings such as small children. Any attempt to solve the problem of evil in this way usually has to attribute moral responsibility for such evil to God. Another way to view evil as justified is that it is unavoidable but compensated for in the afterlife.[33] The problem is that even if the undeserved suffering is compensated for, it is still evil. The problem is not that we complain about future compensation; it is what compensation would be there for evil.[34] The issue with the problem of evil in the modern sense is that we do not have clarity on a historical perspective of it.

A Jewish Response to the Problem of Evil

C.S. Lewis stated that our religion, Christianity, begins among the Jews.[35] While most responses to the problem of evil are theological or philosophical, the *halakha*, or Jewish law, is

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[31] Ibid, 189.

[32] Ibid, 190.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Lewis, *The Problem Of Pain*, 4.

about behavior.[36] Since the problem of evil is one of the oldest in the history of theological inquiry, it should come with an understanding of what Jewish thinkers have contributed to the discussion. Does the Jewish tradition have insights particular to its picture of God, humankind, and the world that are distinctive in essential ways from the insights of other religious traditions? Jewish law, at least until the modern period and for many Jews beyond, has been central to the Jewish spiritual experience.[37] Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik distinguishes human existence as fate and destiny (*goral* and *yu'ud* in Hebrew, respectively). Soloveitchik defines the *goral*/fate/object mode of existence as follows:

> It is an existence of compulsion…a purely factual existence, one link in a mechanical chain, devoid of meaning, direction, purpose, but subject to the forces of the environment into which the individual has been cast by providence…The "I" of fate has the image of an object…as made and not as maker. He is fashioned by his encounter with an objective, external environment… The "I" of fate is caught up in a blind, wholly external dynamic. His being is empty, lacking any inwardness, any independence, and any selfhood. Indeed, an "I" of fate is a contradiction in terms. For how can "I"-awareness and selfhood coexist with pure externality and object like being.[38]

Some people live life today by the fate message or even believing that anything that happens to them somehow is some form of "karma." People living in the *goral* mode respond to evil in their lives in two stages. First, there is the stage of utter confusion and perplexity, and when evil first strikes, the sufferer is crushed, unable to make sense of anything that has befallen him and make sense of life as a whole. Second, the sufferer actively seeks to gain insight into his suffering by struggling to understand the cosmos and God's role in its governance.[39] This leads

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[36] Moshe Sokol, "Is There A "Halakhic" Response To The Problem Of Evil?," *The Harvard Theological Review* 92, no. 3 (July 1999): 311.

[37] Ibid, 312.

[38] Ibid, 314.

[39] Ibid.

the person, again, to assume this is some fate and to struggle with the existence of God or His role in the evil. The alternative, as Soloveitchik identifies, is that of the *yi'ud* or destiny, which he defines as the following:

> It is an active mode of existence, one where in man confronts the environment into which he has been thrown, possessed of an understanding of his uniqueness, of his special worth, of his freedom, and of his ability to struggle with his external circumstances without forfeiting either his independence, or his selfhood…Man is born like an object, dies like an object, but possesses the ability to live like a subject, like a creator, an innovator who can impress his own individual seal upon his life…and enter into a creative, active mode of being. Man's task in the world, according to Judaism is to transform fate into destiny…an existence of compulsion, perplexity and muteness into an existence replete with a powerful will, with resourcefulness, daring and imagination.[40]

The favored, the yu'id dimension of existence calls humanity to respond to suffering actively, creatively, and productively by honestly confronting the horrors of suffering rather than self-deceptively shoving them under some fate. In this instance, the question should be asked, "What must the sufferer do to live through their suffering." The *halakhic* answer to the question is simple: "Afflictions come to elevate a person, to purify and sanctify his spirit…the function of suffering is to mend that which is flawed in an individual's personality."[41] One of the misleading aspects of this thesis is that it does not consider that people suffer because of sin and seems to be a causal explanation of suffering. Moshe Sokol points out that the *yi'ud* and *goral* are human and not exclusively Jewish modes of existence. A *yi'ud*-ic response, then, should be possible outside the framework of the *halakha* in its narrowest, exclusively Jewish sense. The *halakha* is one among many modes of *yi'ud* living, with priority given to the ethical moment.[42]

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[40] Ibid, 315.

[41] Ibid, 316.

[42] Ibid, 316.

One of the critical responses to this presentation is that it offers a theology of suffering, an attempt to make sense of human suffering rather than of theodicy in a classical sense.

Scripture Response

In this last section, we will look at various scriptures that help walk through the problem of evil, emphasizing the book of Job. As Christians, we must first believe in the authority of Scripture, not only as God's inspired Word but also in all situations. We must allow the biblical vision of God's Word to address all of our conditions, even living between both suffering and hope, and we must be aware that the issue of suffering that confronts us today was not unknown in biblical times.[43] To understand this, we can take comfort in knowing that the intensity and depth with which biblical writers wrestle with the problem of evil may be more significant and even more authentic than ours. Still, the global context and scope of issues that arise for us in the twenty-first century are unique in humankind's history.[44] What is a biblical response to the problem of evil and an appropriate response to this perspective in our time?

As stated, we must know that all Scripture is given by sound and is profitable for us through instruction, teaching, and edification (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Paul also tells us in 1 Timothy 2, verses five through six, "For there is on God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time (NASB)." The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ must determine for Christians the matter in which they relate suffering to hope. Just as the death of Christ embraces the various forms of

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[43] J. Christian Beker, *Suffering & Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 31.

[44] Ibid.

suffering in our lives, the resurrection of Christ must be the ground of our hope. Suffering is not seen as meaningless because they do not have the last word in God's world.[45] J. Christian Beker suggests that the central religious dogma of the Deuteronomic law is the scheme of sowing and reaping or reward and punishment, which is described as the idea of retributive justice. He claims that according to the teaching of the Old Testament prophets, Amos, the God of Israel, is a God of justice who rewards obedience with this-worldly blessing and requites disobedience with the curse of this-worldly punishment (Amos 5:10-24).[46] He states that this idea goes back to Exodus chapter twenty-one and is also taken up in Deuteronomy chapter nineteen. He claims that even though the Old Testament prophets present a much more complicated view of God's judgment and mercy, this scheme of reward and punishment is deeply ingrained in the messages of Isaiah chapter 3, Jeremiah chapters seventeen and fifty, Ezekiel chapter seven, and Obadiah.[47] The problem with a simple retributive justice of God is God's plan for redemption and does not answer why the righteous suffer. One possible way to look at an appropriate response to the problem of evil is through the book of Job. Not every book of the Bible lends itself so readily to every age, but the book of Job does.[48] The book of Job stands unique among the Bible in uttering a profound and challenging message: the suffering of the righteous and the sovereignty of God. To understand the book of Job and its relevance to the problem of evil is not knowing when it was written or about the land of Uz, but knowing that it is a noble and a man's book for

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[45] Ibid, 38.

[46] Ibid, 41.

[47] Ibid, 42.

[48] William Bode, *The Book of Job and The Solution of the Problem of Suffering it Offers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma, 1914), 1.

the ages.[49] Augustine stated, "That when we read what great trials Job endured it makes one shudder, it makes one quake, it makes one shrink."[50] The description of Job provided to us should be noted in that his character is described as perfect and upright, and he is one who feared good and eschewed evil.[51] According to chapters four and twenty-nine, He had unusual wealth and was known for his hospitality. He was a wise counselor for the weak and helpless, orphans and widows.[52] Job, like all believers, is assailed by an enemy, which the Bible describes as Satan, a roaring lion roaming about seeking who he should devour. Satan states that the reason Job serves God is only because God has abundantly blessed him. Satan does not want to see the righteous prevail.[53] The key to understanding Job and the beginning of the problem of evil is that God allowed Satan to test Job. One by one, all Job had was lost: his livestock, servants, and finally, his children. Job takes his loss in great faith and bows in deep mourning with a heavy rod and worships God. He utters that sublime passage, which has become classic, which hundreds, encouraged by his example, have repeated: "Jehovah gave, Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah." The comment is also added, "that in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly (Jb. 1:20-22)."[54] With Job standing firm, Satan comes again, and God permits him to touch Job again. Bode states that Job was afflicted with the most severe form of

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[49] Ibid, 3.

[50] Ibid, 7.

[51] Ibid, 15.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid, 16.

[54] Ibid, 17.

leprosy.[55] Through it all, Job did not curse God with his lips but only with his thoughts. Many chapters that follow the opening to the book of Job follow a discussion between Job and his friends, but the understanding of how to look at the problem of evil and how Job helps us understand it can be found in the later chapters.

In Chapter 35, Job complains that his prayers must be heard in verse twelve. His friend Elihu instructs Job that the trouble is not that God refuses to listen but that we, as men, are moved to pray without proper motives. To understand the problem of evil is to see it in the light that when we believe bad things have happened is to look at them through proper context, but many times, we go to God asking the question of 'why' but instead should be asking the question of 'what.' We should ask God what we want us to see through this situation. Many times, we pray to nourish our selfish ends.[56] Verses nine through thirteen discuss that those prayers have no regard since they are in vain. James states something similar in chapter four, verse three, "you ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." One of the first steps to working through the problem of evil is to have the right motive regarding our prayers to God. One of the significant steps to help us understand the problem of evil is a series of questions that God poses to Job in chapter 38. People in times of trials and testing try to reason and rationalize that somehow God messed it all up or that if they were 'god,' they would have done something different. To this, God poses a question to Job in verse 4, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" God goes on to describe the formation of the sea and how beautiful it is. Job is asked whether or not he has any control over

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid, 142.

the break of day and how it acts as a moral agent by rushing the wicked from their hiding places and leaving an impression on the clay.[57] God talks to Job about the depths of the oceans, the surface of the earth, the stars of the sky, and the workings of those in this world. Job is asked whether he can explain the workings of God in nature: how light is disturbed, the wind managed, or the rain disturbed to the places on the earth.[58] Through all of those questions posed by God, Job responds that he cannot do any of those, nor was he involved in the creation process. God carries this idea into chapter thirty-nine, when God describes his providence over the animal kingdom. What was God's reason for this? It is so that Job would no longer see God as a God of unkindness but as one who cares for all of His creation.[59] Job is brought to the point of recognizing God's justice in all He does. James 1:12 tells us, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." When suffering comes in abundant ways, our faith should hold us on our way.[60] It is a fact that Satan does evil and that God permits it. Satan is not co-equal or co-existent with God but subordinate.[61] Job shows us that faith is not conditioned upon outward prosperity. Sometimes, the most incredible light follows those darkest moments. Only when we are tested and tried do we know our strength. Bode describes it this way: True religion stands above every personal interest, the interest of God, and beyond any personal comfort. The glory of God stands above the glory of man. Job's behavior has shown to all the ages that

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[57] Ibid, 156.

[58] Ibid, 157.

[59] Ibid, 162.

[60] Ibid, 178.

[61] Ibid, 179.

prosperity does not necessarily mean religion. In adversities, faith has shown its highest peaks. Therefore, "we glory in tribulation" (Rom. 5:3) and are "patient in tribulation" (Rom. 12:12).[62] Job helps us to see the problem of evil through the lens of scripture, which says that when we suffer, there will be a time of mystery.[63]

CONCLUSION

Philosopher Peter Kreeft gives four solutions to the problem of evil.[64] First, evil is not a thing, an entity, a being. All beings are either the Creator or creatures created by the Creator. But everything God created is good, according to Genesis. We naturally tend to picture evil as a thing—a black cloud, a dangerous storm, a grimacing face, or dirt. But these pictures mislead us. If God is the Creator of all things and evil is a thing, then God is the Creator of evil, and he is to blame for its existence. Evil is not a thing but a wrong choice or the damage done by a bad choice. Evil is no more a positive thing than blindness is. But it is just as accurate. It is not a thing, but it is not an illusion.

Second, the origin of evil is not the Creator but the creature's freely choosing sin and selfishness. Take away all sin and selfishness; you will have heaven on earth. Even the remaining physical evils would no longer rankle and embitter us. Saints endure and even embrace suffering and death as lovers embrace heroic challenges. But they do not embrace sin.

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[62] Ibid, 180.

[63] D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 179.

[64] Peter Kreeft, "The Problem Of Evil," accessed March 2, 2015, http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics/evil.htm. I believe this is the most beneficial step in looking at the problem of evil. I currently use this information in my philosophy courses at Mitchell Community College to discuss the issue of evil.

Furthermore, the cause of physical evil is spiritual evil. The cause of suffering is sin. After Genesis tells the story of the good God creating a good world, it answers the obvious question, "Where did evil come from then?" by the story of the fall of humanity. How are we to understand this? How can spiritual evil (sin) cause physical evil (suffering and death)? If the origin of evil is free will, and God is the origin of free will, isn't God the origin of evil? Only parents are the origin of the misdeeds their children commit by being the origin of their children. The all-powerful God gave us a share in his power to choose freely. Would we prefer he had not and had made us robots rather than human beings?

A third part of the solution to the problem of evil is the most crucial part: how to resolve the issue in practice, not just in theory; in life, not just in thought. Although evil is a severe problem for thought (for it seems to disprove the existence of God), it is even more of a problem in life (for it is the absolute exclusion of God). But even if you think the solution in thought is obscure and uncertain, the solution in practice is as strong and clear as the sun: it is the Son. God's solution to the problem of evil is His Son, Jesus Christ. The Father's love sent his Son to die for us to defeat the power of evil in human nature: that's the heart of the Christian story. We do not worship a deistic God, an absentee landlord who ignores his slum; we worship a garbage-man God who came right down into our worst garbage to clean it up. How do we get God off the hook for allowing evil? God is not off the hook; God is the hook. That's the point of a crucifix. The Cross is God's part of the practical solution to evil. According to the same Gospel, our part is to repent, believe, and work with God in fighting evil by the power of love. The King has invaded; we are finishing the mop-up operation.

Finally, what about the philosophical problem? It is not logically contradictory to say an all-powerful and all-loving God tolerates so much evil when he could eradicate it. Why do bad

things happen to good people? The question makes three questionable assumptions. First, who's to say we are good people? The question should be not "Why do bad things happen to good people?" but "Why do good things happen to bad people?" If the fairy godmother tells Cinderella that she can wear her magic gown until midnight, the question should be not "Why not after midnight?" but "Why did I get to wear it at all?" The question is not why the glass of water is half empty but why it is half full, for all goodness is a gift. The best people are the ones who are most reluctant to call themselves good people. Sinners think they are saints, but saints know they are sinners.

The best man who lived once said, "No one is good but God alone." Second, who's to say suffering is all bad? Life without it would produce spoiled brats and tyrants, not joyful saints. Rabbi Abraham Heschel says, "The man who has not suffered, what can he possibly know, anyway?" Suffering can work for the greater good of wisdom. It is not true that all things are good, but it is true that "all things work together for good to those who love God." Third, who's to say we have to know all God's reasons? Who ever promised us all the answers? Animals can't understand much about us; why should we be able to understand everything about God? The apparent point of the Book of Job, the world's most significant exploration of the problem of evil, is that we don't know what God is up to. What a hard lesson to learn: Lesson One: we are ignorant and infants! No wonder the Delphic Oracle declared Socrates the wisest man in the world. He interpreted that declaration to mean that he knew he did not have wisdom, which was true wisdom for man.

When looking at the evil in this world, we need to understand as believers that we live in a fallen world where choices are made and consequences come with them. As believers, we must remember that God has a plan and purpose for everything. Romans chapter eight, verse

twenty-eight, says, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Those who love God and are called for His purpose should know that God works everything out. We also need to be like Samuel when we are facing trials. Samuel spoke five words in First Samuel chapter three, verse nine, that every believer needs to be able to say to God, not only in times of trials but in every situation. Those words are, “Speak, Lord thy servant hearth.” God can use every situation in our lives, and every situation either draws us closer to God or away from God. We should not let the problem of evil draw us away from God.

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